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Friday, April 29, 2005

State to pad MEAP scores

Marks will be revised after 4th- and 7th-grade students did poorly on the tougher writing test.

By Mark Hornbeck / The Detroit News

LANSING -- Scores were alarmingly low on the statewide fourth- and seventh-grade writing tests this year, prompting education officials to decide the exams were probably just too tough for students to handle.

The Michigan Education Assessment Program office has pulled back the results of the writing tests taken in those grades so officials can figure out how to prop up the dismal scores. That could slightly delay the release of the results, which were due out next week.

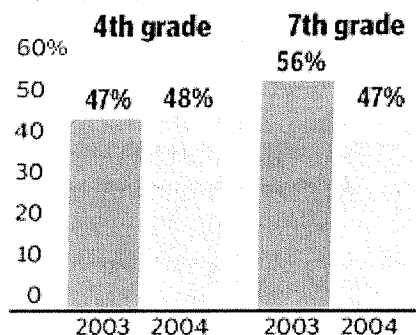
"After analyzing the test and the results, assessment experts determined this year's writing 'prompts' (essay questions) were more difficult than previous years, requiring a revised scoring scale so the results are statistically comparable" to past scores, said Martin Ackley, spokesman for the Department of Education.

Some lawmakers and parents expressed skepticism about revising the scores, particularly in light of the state's goal to boost the substandard performance on writing tests by those two grades in previous years.

State education officials have stressed that they consider writing and other communication skills nearly as important in producing world-class students as proficiency

Writing skills

Students met or exceeded standards:



Source: Michigan Department of Education
The Detroit News

CyberSurvey

Revise MEAP scores?

State education officials believe that the alarmingly low scores on fourth- and seventh-grade writing tests this year indicate that the revised exams were too tough. They intend to devise a revised scoring scale so the results are statistically comparable to past scores. Do you approve of this plan?

☐ Yes

☐ No

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Online Resources

[▶ U.S. Department of Education](#)
The government's official site.

[▶ Michigan Department of Education](#)
Michigan's official NCLB website with downloadable school rankings in PDF form.

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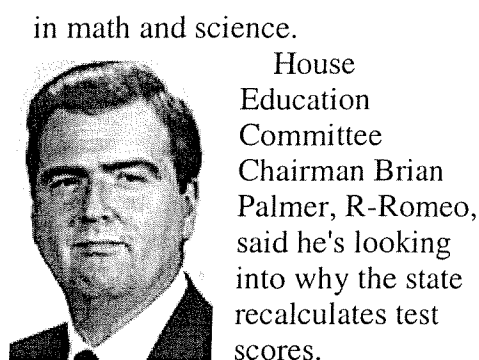
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in math and science.

House Education Committee Chairman Brian Palmer, R-Romeo, said he's looking into why the state recalculates test scores.

"Anytime you talk about

recalibrating scores because you don't get the scores you like, it makes me nervous," Palmer said. "We're waiting for an analysis as to why. If the writing test was wrong, why was it wrong? If we made a test that was too difficult, why did we do that?"

"We're supposed to be making our standards tougher, anyway, to meet federal No Child Left Behind goals. So scores might suffer at first but hopefully they'll improve in a few years as the content taught in the classroom gets better."

Riverview parent Allison Swanson also wondered about the wisdom of recalculating scores.

"I'm a little concerned that if you don't like what you see you go back and change it so it'll look prettier, rather than taking a hard look at why you fell short," said Swanson, who has children in first, eighth and 10th grades. "I'm not sure that's the right thing."

Ackley said the statewide average on the writing test was more than 10 percentage points lower than last year, when 48 percent of fourth-graders and 47 percent of seventh-graders met or exceeded standards on the state exams. Overall last year, Michigan students improved scores in seven of 10 tests, and dropped only in seventh-grade writing and eighth-grade social studies.

"The scores we sent out alerted the school districts, and that's why we recalculated and updated," Ackley

► National Center for Educational Statistics

Profile of Michigan with key data about student and school population and its NAEP testing history and results.

► The No Child Left Behind website

Tour Across America Video Highlights.

► NAESP

A letter to President Bush from the National Association of Elementary School Principals concerning NCLB.

► Houghton Mifflin's NCLB page

Collected links to the latest national education news concerning NCLB.

Previously Reported

► 120 Michigan schools get F's on first report card

► Nearly 900 Michigan schools don't meet progress goals

► List of underachieving schools, part 1

► List of underachieving schools, part 2

► List of underachieving schools, part 3

► Schools make changes to meet federal law

About school report cards

Details about the makeup of report cards for schools under the state's Education Yes school accreditation plan:

-- Michigan Educational Assessment Program test: 67 percent of grade. Among the factors it considers is whether student achievement is going up or down.

-- School Performance: 33 percent of the grade. It considers factors including family involvement, school curriculum, student attendance, professional development for teachers and other things such as whether a school has arts education and humanities courses.

-- If the school makes adequate yearly progress on the MEAP, as required under the federal No Child Left Behind act, the grade may go up; if it doesn't, the grade may go down.

Source: Michigan Department of Education

Details on adequate yearly progress

Adequate yearly progress

Schools

- Schools April 29, 20
- State to scores
- U-M plan Detroit
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- Teacher approved in and Bright
- Legislation introduced change Mei
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said.

Ernie Bauer, director of testing for Oakland Schools, said there was a similar differential between last year's scores and this year's results on the writing tests in Oakland County.

"These were preliminary scores, and the reason they were put out there was so districts could look at them and react," said Bauer, who is on the MEAP technical advisory committee. "They're not results for public consumption."

Rob Minard, executive director of the Great Lakes Education Project, a Grand Rapids-based group that advocates school choice, said the education department's move to "change the grading scale is cause for serious concern."

"What kind of message are we sending to students when we lower the bar just because we don't like the outcome?" Minard said. "You can't suddenly change the rules of the game just because you are down 10 points at halftime. If there is a need for improvement, we won't know where to begin if the problem is glossed over for fear that the results might not look good to the public."

The MEAP writing tests contain only one essay question. By comparison, the math MEAP test includes about 50 items. If that one question is more difficult than queries posed in past years the results can be skewed, Ackley explained. Starting with this fall's test, the writing exams will include more than one essay question in addition to multiple choice items to avoid similar problems, he said.

"These additional items will strengthen the year-to-year links of the writing score scale in the future," Ackley said.

The state is under increasing pressure to have students perform well on assessment testing --

measures whether schools have improved their Michigan Educational Assessment Program test scores from year to year. The goal is that schools do better each year, until 100 percent of students are proficient on the test. That goal is to be reached, under the federal No Child Left Behind act, in the 2013-14 school year. Progress is measured by math and reading scores. Schools also have to show that students in certain demographic groups, which include racial groups and special education students, are making progress.

If schools don't meet the requirements, they face sanctions that increase each year they are on the list. The sanctions include:

Schools not making AYP for two years in a row:

- Identified for school improvement and must notify parents of their status;
- Must offer to allow students to transfer to a school within the district that makes AYP;
- District must pay for transportation of transferring students using some of its Title I money;
- Will receive technical assistance to improve performance;
- Must implement a two-year school improvement plan.

Schools not making AYP for three years in a row:

- Must offer supplemental services, such as tutoring, to low-achieving students.

Schools not making AYP for four years in a row:

- Identified for corrective action and must follow one of the options as selected by the school district: replace staff who are relevant to failure to make AYP; implement a new curriculum and provide professional development; decrease management authority; appoint outside expert to advise on school improvement plan; extend school year or school day; or restructure internal organization of school.

Schools not making AYP for five years in a row:

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especially in reading and math -- because of federal standards under the No Child Left Behind Act that ratchet up each year.

No Child Left Behind sets out federal requirements designed to ensure every student is proficient in reading and math by 2014.

In Michigan, 109, or about 20 percent, of the state's school districts failed to meet the adequate yearly progress goals under President Bush's controversial education initiative. In Metro Detroit, 30 of the 88 districts in Wayne, Oakland, Macomb and Livingston counties fell short.

Schools that don't pass face a range of consequences, from being required to provide tutoring, to firing of teachers and administrators to state takeover. Writing is not a subject area covered under the federal law.

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-- Identified for restructuring and must begin planning for it.

Schools not making AYP for six years in a row:

-- Must implement restructuring and follow one of these options as selected by the school district: Reopen as charter school; replace all or most of relevant school staff; contract with outside entity to operate school; undergo a state takeover; or undertake any other major restructuring of school's governance that makes fundamental reform.

Sources: Michigan School Public Relations Association and the Michigan Department of Education.

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